

Outreach Insider



News, ideas, and information
on NRCS Outreach initiatives
and projects in Illinois

USDA

Natural Resources Conservation Service

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Outreach Message:



Bill Gradle
State Conservationist

Greetings! What do most companies do in order to keep selling their product and keep growing? They work on improving quality, bump up customer service, and continually try to expand their client base.

Well, I think that makes NRCS just like most every business in this country today. We just finalized our quality assurance plan. We are continually working to meet our present client's ever-changing technical needs. And we are "reaching out," trying to educate and provide assistance to new groups and audiences that I'm sure Hugh Hammond Bennett never even dreamed of!

Back when conservation first became a national priority, it was enough for us to try and address the needs of our nation's farmers. That was the "client" with a problem for which we had a science-based solution. Now, as we strive to protect and preserve natural resources on all our country's private lands, we must tailor our message, alter our approach and the format for product delivery, and wear many different hats in order to maintain our "company's" net worth and profitability.

Our agency's emphasis on attracting and marketing ourselves to new audiences and broadening our client base through "outreach" really isn't anything new. It's an age-old business tactic used by any and every company that's still kicking today.

NRCS has been alive and kicking for well over 60 years—and as far as I'm concerned, we're just getting started!

Willie J. Gradle

Illinois State Conservationist

What is Outreach?

Outreach is a way of conducting business that ensures underserved individuals and groups throughout the United States and its territories are made aware of, understand, and have a working knowledge of USDA programs and services. Outreach will ensure that these programs and services are equitable and made accessible to all.



*What's
Happening
in Illinois—*

Dozier Contributes to Award Winning Exhibit

Macoupin County District Conservationist Ivan Dozier contributed technical assistance to the creators of a garden exhibit, which took top honors at the March 13-19 Chicago Flower Show, held at the Navy Pier.

The display was sponsored by the Batavia Plain Dirt Gardeners and featured a piece of Mother Earth indoors. Moving tons and tons of soil, 25,000 gallons of water and a long list of native plants, the garden's designer did not stop there. Incorporated into the 150 by 75 foot exhibit were a number of artifacts of Native American culture and several members of the Midwest SOARRING group who "lived" in the display throughout the term of the flower show. They worked on traditional crafts and scheduled a number of Native dances and other events.

As the Native American Liaison of the Natural Resources Conservation Service and as a member of several Indian tribes, Dozier provided a basis in working knowledge of the native plants. He has been able to work with members of Midwest SOARRING at returning some of the knowledge of these plants to a Native population that has become largely urban in Illinois. Dozier is fluent in the traditional medicinal uses of these plant materials and helped in obtaining them. In order to get the plants

in full leaf and flower for the March show work began last summer.

Dozier communicated with members of the Plain Dirt Gardeners of Batavia about their concept, their second entry to the flower show. Members of that gardening club donated many of the wildflowers in the display from their home gardens. All of the plant material was brought into early bloom or grown at the University of Illinois Research greenhouse in Geneva by club members.

The Chicago Flower Show demonstrated that these ideas represent a growing trend in home gardens. The awards won included the Land of Lincoln Award and the Governor's Award. The average attendance at the show is about 150,000; this year the attendance exceeded 200,000. While people filed past the exhibit, they got a close look at many common native plants. Many attendees commented on the beauty of the plants; they hadn't known these plants were supposed to be used as landscape plants. Some people reminisced about where these plants used to grow.



(Left to Right) Ivan Dozier and Joe "Standing Bear" Schranz standing near the display at the Chicago Flower Show.



Joel "Standing Bear" Schranz demonstrating weaving techniques amongst native plants at the Chicago Flower Show.

Yellow Lady Slipper, Green Dragon, wild geranium, rue anemone, trillium, dogwood, willows, and coneflowers — all combined to make a peaceful spot. These native plants generally need very little care, blooming in their own season. They tolerate Illinois' unreliable weather and they multiply, usually modestly.

The garden show is just one aspect of work Dozier has done with Midwest SOARRING. Macoupin County Soil & Water Conservation District has joined with Midwest SOARRING in applying for, and obtaining a grant for providing a pair of small greenhouses to experiment in the production of native forbs and grasses. They aim to continue to provide knowledge and an opportunity to place these plants back in a landscape where they can take their place in the Sacred Circle of Life.

This assistance to the Batavia Plain Dirt Gardeners brought Native American sensibilities and their relationship with the earth to the attention of a wide audience. The possibilities of partnering with various groups may prove important in helping Midwest SOARRING in achieving their goal of preserving the knowledge of their elders and showing their youth that being fluent in this knowledge can provide opportunities.

Repercussions of this effort, both in future partnering of various groups as well continued progress in the Midwest SOARRING's native plants efforts, should be felt well into the future.



Outreach Reporting

Hancock County SWCD Gets A Big Hand with Newsletter

This spring the Hancock County SWCD contacted the Hancock County Mental Health Center to see if they would be interested in helping with the District's newsletter. In the past, the SWCD has

folded, addressed, sorted and prepared the newsletter for mailing themselves, requiring many hours of District and NRCS labor. The Mental Health Center has a workforce that contracts services to local businesses. They recently completed the second edition newsletter for the District and have done a splendid job. The newsletter goes directly from the printer to the Mental Health Center and their finished product is ready for the post office. Their fee for doing the work goes towards ongoing programs at the Center. The Hancock County SWCD/NRCS office is glad to have the opportunity to utilize this valuable workforce.

Prescribed Burning Workshop

Interstate RC&D, NRCS, Rock Island County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) and Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) cooperated in conducting a prescribed burning training/workshop to small farmers with native grass plantings on their land. The small farmers were invited to attend the workshop by direct mail. Interstate RC&D transported participants from the classroom to the site where the burn was conducted via bus. Sixty people attended the classroom/field workshop to learn about burn ecology, safety and equipment.



Participants watch initial burn at Kenny Brush's farm, Milan, IL.



Control burn in progress at Kenny Brush's farm, Milan, IL

How Do You Measure Outreach Success?

Tammy Willis, Soil Conservationist, Freeport, IL

What is true outreach? Is it the kind of outreach that comes easy? For example, is it working with traditional customers, sending out brochures, or is it the kind of outreach that takes two to five years to complete a project? Here's my story!

While reading the morning mail, I came across some information on starting a community garden and I thought to myself, this would be a good outreach project for Freeport residents. I had worked on an outreach project on the eastside of Freeport before and noticed that there were plenty of vacant lots. All I had to do was to get the community interested in the idea.

I made arrangements to attend four neighborhood community meetings to share the community gardens idea with residents. At the meetings, I brought handouts on starting a community garden as well as beautiful pictures of a successful community garden project in Winnebago County. Of the four community meetings, two groups were not interested; one group had a project that they were currently working on, and only one person showed-up at the fourth meeting.

Had I given up on this project? No, I had to remind myself that I was not working with traditional NRCS customers, but with people with NO knowledge of NRCS, SWCD, and the programs that we offer. The first thing I had to do was win their trust, gain respect, and inform them about our programs.

I have learned many things trying to get this project on the ground, but the three most important things were: (1) Finding a community leader to work with (initially) instead of the whole group is essential, (2) Do not to set a time limit on a projects, and (3) Never give up!

Who said success stories had to have a happy ending? I sure didn't. You might be saying how is this an outreach success story: It's a success story because even though the four groups had no interest in developing a community garden, I had the privilege of meeting non-traditional customers and sharing information on starting a community garden. I was also able to introduce them to NRCS and, other agencies and programs that could benefit them in their future endeavors. I may not have assisted in planting a community garden but I have planted future seeds for a successful project. I am not certain of when it will happen, but I am convinced it will. Now that's success!

Local Youth Learn through Agriculture and Conservation Field Day

Around 780 fifth-graders from Brown, Adams, and Pike Counties joined together on April 28 to gain some hands-on conservation and agriculture education. A total of 26 stations manned by personnel from local, state, and federal agencies concentrated on the various areas of natural resources — forestry, soils, wildlife, and aquatics. The youth were chattering throughout the day about the reptile tent where the students were allowed to hold various snakes in the Conservation Police wildlife trailer. Other stations introduced agriculture occupation opportunities, erosion control conservation practices, farm safety, and caring for the water supply. The sponsors hope that the participants had fun while they learned about our natural resources. The event was held at the Orr Research Center/John Wood Community College Ag Center near Perry. The event proved a huge success for the sponsors of the event, the Soil and Water Conservation Districts and the University of Illinois Extension offices of the three counties.



Students learn through Conservation Jeopardy game.



IDNR personnel talk about aquatics.

Chicago Area Youths Exposed to Nature

Children in the Northwest suburbs of Chicago rarely take part in environmental outdoors-recreational activities. They are often forced to play on the sidewalks and parking lots around their homes and apartment complexes. On July 7th, the Girl Scouts of Naperville, IL conducted a three-day open site at the Girl Scout campground to expose underprivileged children to environmental activities. Approximately three hundred elementary school age children were in attendance. Elizabeth Hagan of the St. Charles SWCD office set up three workstations for the children to experience nature and the environment. Danielle Pleas, NRCS Summer Intern, conducted a pond activity, which involved identifying trees, flowers, insects, and native birds. The children were able to take pond water samples and identify what they saw, such as damselfly nymphs and red bloodworms. Handouts were provided and questions were asked about the activities conducted to determine what the students retained from the project. The children seemed very enthusiastic and eager to learn about the environment and the importance of sustainability.

Central Illinois Students Get A Touch of Nature

The Marshall-Putnam SWCD had the opportunity to talk to 42 students from Central Illinois about the soils of Illinois at Wildlife Prairie Park near Peoria. The students participated in the Students Integrating Mathematics, Science, and Technology (SIMaST) program which provides low income, academically gifted, minority middle school students with enrichment experiences in scientific inquiry, mathematical problem solving, writing skills, use of new technologies, and career opportunities. The four week, overnight, program was conducted at ISU for two weeks, a week at Wildlife Prairie Park, and a week at Bradley University in Peoria.

Tom Miller, Resource Conservationist, explained how the soils of Illinois were formed and provided a historical perspective of the Illinois River Valley. The students learned about soil profiles by viewing soil monoliths and saw how soil particles settled showing the sand, silt, and clay layers. A student assisted Tom with soil borings in the Bison pasture and everyone was able to see and touch the soil cores. Students learned about careers related to conservation and what courses of study would prepare them for this profession. The students had excellent questions and challenged their

teachers on certain soil related concepts, which the teachers were unable to answer! Their eagerness to gain additional knowledge about soils made the presentation fun and exciting.

A virtual tour of the program can be viewed at their website:

<http://coe.ilstu.edu/labschool/metcalf/simast/index.htm>

Water Quality Workshop Held for Jo Daviess Residents

A one day workshop titled "Water Quality: What Everyone Needs to Know" was held in Jo Daviess County on June 16th at the River Ridge High School in Elizabeth. The Jo Daviess County Ecosystem Partners, Jo Daviess SWCD, and the Jo Daviess Cooperative Extension Service sponsored the workshop.

Participants received a packet of water quality related handout materials as they registered and then had the choice of attending 3 hour long sessions from the 14 sessions offered. The sessions were: Buffer/Filter Strips by Jerry Misek, NRCS; Sewer/Septic Systems Management by Gordon Coursen, Jo Daviess Co. Health Dept.; Nutrient Management by Wes Winter, U of I Extension, Stephenson County Extension; The Mississippi River by Mike Steuck, Iowa Dept. of Natural Resources; Streambank Stabilization by Chris Haring, Jo Daviess SWCD; Stream Monitoring by Nancy Winter, Jo Daviess Co. Natural Area Guardians; Water Testing by Larry Lyons, Lyons Well Drilling, Gordon Coursen, Jo Daviess Co. Health Dept.; Developers & Water Quality, Thomas Krapf, NRCS; Understanding Government Programs, Jim Ritterbush, NRCS; Herbicides, Nitrates, & Surface Contamination by John Church, U of I Extension, Rockford Extension Center; Wetland by Pam Steinhaus, U.S. Fish and Wildlife; Well Capping/Sealing/Abandoned Wells by Gordon Coursen, Jo Daviess Co. Health Dept., Larry Lyons, Lyons Well Drilling; Ponds by Tim Ertmer, NRCS; Keeping



Madelynn Wilharm (w/net) demonstrating sampling procedures for the River Watch program during the Apple River tour.

Contaminants Out of Groundwater by John Church, U of I Extension, Rockford Extension Center.

Lunch was served at noon at the nearby Elizabeth Community Building where several water quality displays were exhibited.

The afternoon session included a bus tour throughout the county featuring: farm ponds, actual sealing of an abandoned well, contour buffer strips, a river sampling demonstration, grassed waterways and erosion control structures, a confined hog operation with a complete manure and nutrient management system, riparian buffer planting, contour strips and pastureland, and streambank stabilization. The program reached a wide range of people and will likely be offered again next year.

Grants Opportunities

USDA's Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program is soliciting for proposals. The SBIR program supports innovative R&D projects on all aspects of American Agriculture and/or rural America. All small business owners, including farmers and ranchers are eligible to apply. Proposal must be submitted in nine different project areas: forestry, and related resources, plant production and protection, air, water, and soils; food science and nutrition; rural and community development; aquaculture; industrial applications; and marketing and trade. Approximately \$16 million is available nationally. More information can be found at the following website: www.reeuusda.gov/sbir or by calling (202) 401-4002.

Conferences

November 3-4, 2000

8th National Small Farm Trade Show and Conference, Columbia, MO.

For more information call:
1-800-633-2535

September 17-20, 2000

Third National Small Farm Conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico

For more information call:
202-205-0467

Internet Connections

Outreach Website

An Illinois outreach website has been established to provide resource information. The site provides general outreach information on developing an outreach strategy and it has links to other agencies, possible funding sources, and other valuable information. The Illinois NRCS outreach website can be accessed at:

www.il.nrcs.usda.gov/outreach/Outreach.html

Grant Info On-Line

"Grant News," a grant listing newsletter produced by the Illinois State University Applied Social Research Unit is now available on-line. The newsletter lists grant opportunities available from various private and public sources. "Grant News" can be accessed at:

www.socialresearch.ilstu.edu/asru/publications.htm

Who Do I Call With Outreach Questions?

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If you have an outreach related article, story idea, or success story to share, please send it to:

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